Twentieth Century Drama

Q. 104. What were the factors responsible for the emergence of drama as a powerful literary force during the twentieth century?

Ans. The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of drama, which had been neglected by the Victorian poets and dramatists, as a powerful literary force. All the conditions operating against the blossoming of Drama during the Victorian age were gradually removed, and more and more interest was taken by actors, playgoers, and theatre managers in popularising drama and making it a force to reckon with in the field of literature. As time passed, new trends were introduced in drama and every effort was made by dramatists to make drama life-like, realistic, and appealing to the common man. The moral taboos imposed on drama by the priggish Victorians were also removed and dramatists were at ease in producing once again comedies of manners, which had enjoyed their heyday during the Restoration period. The vogue for comedies was once again introduced in the wake of the social changes and democratic freedom that came with the new century. The new social problems rising in the new set up of values cried for solution, and drama seemed to be a fitting medium in which justice could be done in solving the social and economic problems of the times. The modern dramatist took his task seriously and gave a new outlook to drama, which it had not seen in the Victorian age.

Recounting the emergence of drama as a powerful force in our times J. W. Marriot writes in The Modern Drama—"It is possible to account for the miracle that happened? There is no single explanation, but we can discern a dozen or more contributory factors all of which seem significant. There has been a gradual disappearance of the ancient prejudice against theatre going, a welcome relaxation of the censorship, a steady rise in standards of judgment, due to the spread of education, an increas-
ing margin of leisure in the life of the ordinary man and woman, a deepening conviction that a certain amount of recreation is the natural right of every human being, and the remarkable competence in the theatre for amusement. We have to recognize the influence of the new producer with his theories of drama as a composite art—a synthesis of all arts. The arrival of the new scenic artist and the stage, electrician has revolutionised production. But the greatest factor of all is undoubtedly the change in the dramatist himself. The modern dramatist takes the drama seriously. His purpose is the interpretation of life and playwriting has become an art as well as a craft."

Q. 105. Write a short essay on the main characteristics and features of twentieth century drama.

Ans. Drama, which had suffered a steep decline during the Victorian Age was revived with great gusto in the beginning of the twentieth century, and the course of six decades has witnessed many trends and currents in the twentieth century drama.

Realism.

Realism is the most significant and outstanding quality of modern drama. The dramatists of early years of the twentieth century were interested in naturalism and realism and it was their endeavour to deal with real problems of life in a realistic technique in their plays. "The post-war generation of men and women started the demand for reality above all things. They demanded that dramatists should show them 'life,' as if living itself were not sufficiently intense for them. The theatre was not an escape for them."

It was Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, who popularised realism in modern drama. He dealt with the problems of real life in a realistic manner in his plays. His example was followed by Robertson, Jones, Pinero, Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw in their plays. In the dramas of these realists we get glimpses of real life, with all its warts and sordid ugliness. They deal with problems of marriage, justice, law, administration and strife.

* J. W. Marriott—The Modern Drama.
** Sir Cedric Hardwicke—The Drama Tomorrow.
between capital and labour and use the theatre as a means for bringing about reforms in the conditions of society prevailing in their days.

Modern drama has developed the Problem Play, and there are many modern dramatists who have written a number of Problem Plays in our times. Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy are the writers who have given a spurt to problem plays. In their hands the "problem plays became a powerful and effective medium of social criticism, and generally vindicated the right of the individual to shape his life and destiny, unfettered by the prejudices and conventions of society. It dramatised the conflict of ideas and social attitudes, and upheld the principles of equality, freedom and justice. The problem play was a new experiment in form and technique, and dispensed with the conventional devices and expedients of the theatre."

* Play of Ideas.

Modern drama is essentially a drama of ideas rather than action. The stage is employed by dramatists to give expression to certain ideas which they seek to propagate in society. The modern drama dealing with the problems of life has become far more intellectual than ever it was in the history of drama before the present age. "With the treatment of actual life the drama became more and more a drama of ideas, sometimes veiled in the main action, sometimes didactically set forth."

Romanticism.

The earlier dramatists of the twentieth century were Realists to the core, but the passage of time brought in new trends in modern drama. Romanticism, which had been very dear to Elizabethan dramatists found its way in modern drama, and it was mainly due to Sir J. M. Barrie's effort that the new wave of romanticism swept over modern drama for some years of the twentieth century. Barrie kept aloof from sordid and squalid realities of life and made excursions into the world of romance, fantasy, magic and super-naturalism in such plays as Mary Rose, Peter Pan, A Kiss for Cinderella, Admirable Crichton and Dear Brutus. He charmed his readers by the tender whimsicality of

* Dr. R. C. Gupta—The Problem Play.
** A. Nicoll—British Drama.
his imagination; and provided them an escape from the drab and
dull realities of life.

Poetic Plays.

Another reaction to realism and naturalism in drama was
evincing in the popularisation of poetic plays by a host of drama-
tists who have produced poetic plays in large numbers. T. S.
Bliot espoused the cause of poetic plays against the realistic
prose drama of the modern age. He stated, "I believe that
poetry is the natural and complete medium for drama and the
verse play is capable of something much more intense and
exciting."

Among those who gave an impetus to poetic drama in our
times the names of Stephen Phillips, J. E. Flecker, John
Drinkwater, John Masefield, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and
Christopher Fry are worthy of special mention. They have made
poetic plays a force to reckon with in modern drama.

Historical and Biographical Plays.

Another trend perceptible in modern drama is in the di-
rection of using history and biography for dramatic treatment.
There are many beautiful historical and biographical plays in
modern dramatic literature. Shaw’s Caesar and Cleopatra and
St. Joan are historical plays of great importance. Ervine wrote
The Lady of Belmont and popularised the old historical char-
acters in Shakespeare’s plays. John Drinkwater penned four
historical plays: Abraham Lincoln (1918) Mary Stuart (1921—22)
Oliver Cromwell (1922) and Robert Lee (1923). In each one of
these plays there is a central dominating personality standing
on a higher pedestal over the multiplicity of individually deli-
cinated characters. Clifford Bax wrote several historical plays,
the chief of them being Mr. Pepys (1926) Socrates (1930), The
Venetian (1936). Bax’s effective treatment of character
his skilful wielding of material, and his delicate sense of style
give prime distinction to his work."

Biography has been dexterously used in two prominent
plays of our times. Barrets of Wimpole Street by Rudolf Besies
and The Lady with a Lamp by Reginald Berkley. In the former

* A. Nicoll: British Drama.
play biographical details about Robert Browning and Mr. Elizabeth Barrett Browning form the texture of the play, while the latter play deals with the life and achievements of Florence Nightingale.

The Irish Movement

A new trend in modern drama was introduced by the Irish dramatists who brought about the Celtic Revival in literature. In the hands of the Irish dramatists like W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, Leano Robinson, T. C. Murray, and Edward Martyn, drama ceased to be realistic in character, and became an expression of the hopes and aspirations of the Irish people from remote days to their own times. The imaginative idealism which has always characterised the Celtic races, the love of passionate and dreamy poetry which has exercised a fascination over the Irish mind, the belief in the fairy world which has been an article of faith in the Irish people have been represented in modern Irish drama. The object of the above stated Irish dramatists was, "not to make people think but to make them feel; to give them an emotional and spiritual uplifting such as they might experience at Mass in a Cathedral or at the performance of a sympathy."

Impressionism.

Impressionism constitutes another important feature of modern drama. In the impressionistic plays of W. B. Yeats, the main effort is in the direction of recreating the experience of the artist and his impressions about reality, rather than in presenting reality as it is. Impressionistic drama of the modern age seeks to suggest the impressions on the artist rather than make an explicit statement about the objective characteristics of things or events.

Expressionism.

Expressionism is another important feature of modern drama. It marks an extreme reaction against naturalism. The movement which had started early in Germany made its way in English drama, and several modern dramatists like Sean O’ Casey, C. K. Munro, H. F. Rubinstein, J. B. Priestley, Elmer Rice and Eugene O Neill have made experiments in the expressionistic tendency in modern drama. “Expressionist drama was concerned
not with society but with man. It aimed to offer subjective, psychological analysis not so much of an individual as of a type, and it made much of the subconscious. For such a study, established dramatic forms and methods of expression were inadequate, and the expressionists threw overboard conventional structure in favour of an unrestricted freedom. Their dialogue was often cryptic and patterned, now verse, now prose, and was in every way as far removed from the naturalistic prose of the realist school as can well be imagined."*

**Comedy of Manners.**

There is a revival of the comedy of manners in modern dramatic literature. Oscar Wilde, Noel Coward, and Somerset Maugham have done much to revive the comedy of wit in our days. The drama after the second world war has not exhibited a love for comedy, and the social conditions of the period after the war are not very favourable for the blossoming of the artificial comedy of the Restoration age. ‘The Comedy of Manners is a tender plant and will not bloom if cold winds are blowing.’**

**Stage Directions.**

In modern drama there are elaborate stage directions. These stage directions considerably ease the work of dramatic production on the stage. One comes across elaborate stage directions in the plays of Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw.

**Technique.**

In modern drama the three classical unities of time, place and action are generally maintained. Dialogues in modern drama are short and trenchant. The lack of action is made up by fine dialogues. Further, ‘Soliloques’ and ‘Asides’ have been completely avoided in modern drama.

**Conclusion.**

Whatever confusion there may be, however, and whatever failure may occur, it is certain that the Renaissance of English drama heralded in the nineties of the last century has not lost its vital force, and modern drama is a tremendous literary force in twentieth century literature.

* E. Albert: A History of English Literature.

** A. Nicoll: British Drama:
Q. 106. Give your estimate of Henry Arthur Jones (1851—1929) and A. W. Pinero (1855—1934) as pioneers of the new drama in the twentieth century.

Ans. Henry Arthur Jones and A. W. Pinero were the pioneers in the field of twentieth century drama, and they carried forward the heritage of Robertson in their dramatic works.

The plays of Henry Arthur Jones can be divided into three periods. His earliest efforts were in the direction of producing sentimental and melodramatic plays. *The Silver King* (1882) is a landmark among his melodramatic plays. "His early melodramas were excellent, relying as they did on steadily intensifying emotion rather than on stage carpentry, and moving always to a climax that satisfied the ethical." *

The second period began with *Saints and Sinners* (1884). Streaks of melodrama are combined with flashes of satire. This play is a prelude to many other social plays such as *The Crusades, The Hypocrites*, and the *Breaking of a Butterfly*. In these plays Jones endeavoured to present in a sincere way the problems of middle class life. Though here and there, there are melodramatic extravagances and a predilection for the picture poster situation yet the general impression left on our minds after reading these plays is that of realism. His plays portray the progressive individuals standing against the effete conventions of an outmoded and tyrannical society. Jones does not sympathise with the rebel like Susan Harabin, but he gives a good exposition to their point of view.

The third and the best period of Jones's dramatic art was devoted to the composition of comedies marked with satire and jollity. *The Liars* (1897) is a delightful comedy modelled on the style of the Comedy of Manners.

Jones was popularising social comedies, but the presence of melodramatic scenes militated against their social appeal. He lacked breath of outlook and depth of thought, and was oft led away by sentiment and melodramatic flashes. But despite these drawbacks he paved the way for social comedy and problem play.

* J. W. Marriott: Modern Drama.
Jones was a skilled craftsman with a real sense of the theatre and the ability to create effective scenes. But in every branch of drama he attempted, he failed to achieve signal success. "Jones's true value is as an innovator who pointed the way for others greater than himself."

Arthur Wing Pinero.

A. W. Pinero was the son of a lawyer and was intended for his father's profession, but he chose the dramatic field in preference to the wrangles of the law court. Like Jones, Pinero began with trivial comedies and farces, but later on drifted to the production of serious social plays. Pinero's first notable production The Money Spinner was followed by other comedies and social satires such as The Magistrate (1885), The School Mistress (1886), Dandy Dick (1887), Sweet Lavender (1888), The Princess and the Butterfly (1889), and the Weaker Sex (1889). These early attempts of Pinero are satirical in tone and reformative in appeal.

Pinero's real genius as a dramatist is unfolded in his The Profligate, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The Thunderbolt, and The Notorious Mrs. Ethel Smith. These plays are serious in tone and tragic in theme. They represent life in realistic colours. The much talked play Second Mrs. Tanqueray is an exceptionally vulgar and hideous piece of work. It deals with the meccinations of a sinful woman to undo her respectable husband. It is destitute of healthy sentiment. Pinero was criticised by St. John Ervine for vulgarity, but the dramatist did not bother for the criticism; for the problem plays produced at this time were usually repugnant to good taste.

Pinero was a pioneer in the field of introducing realism and satire in drama. His realism was tempered by conventional melodramatic intrusions, mawkish sentimentalism and footlight expedients. Still the main accent in his works is on the prejudices and the errors of the upper middle class society of his age.

"Pinero had an effective sense of stage situation, his plays are well written and his characters are more life like than characters in English drama had been for generations before he began to write, though by the time of his death in 1934 most of his plays appeared naive and artificial to a generation that was
more sophisticated and better informed about life and its problems."*

Assessment of Jones and Pinero.

"In the hands of Pinero and Jones the drama was coming closer to real life. But they were both too clever and too sensitive to popular taste to advance too quickly. They knew that actor-manager is still wanted 'for' acting parts. They knew that the theatre-going public still wanted an absorbing story. And so they were careful to provide theatrical excitement of all good old kind. They still sacrificed consistency of characterisation to the exigencies of the plot. The catastrophe was brought about too often by co-incidence: they still faked circumstances for theatrical effect. Their realism was only superficial. The actions of the plays were always possible and credible, but sometimes questionably probable and seldom invincible."**

"Neither Jones nor Pinero were more than skilful practitioners who grew impatient with the mechanical patterns of drama as they found it and tried to provide novelty and depth by discussing problems of contemporary morality. They had neither the wit of Oscar Wilde nor of Shaw nor did they have the literary imagination" or the depth of moral and psychological understanding to be able to present a social problem as a typical one."†

"In defence of Jones and Pinero it can be said that whatever failings they might have as pioneers in the field of realistic drama, they were masters of their craft and important figures in the dramatic revival of our times.

Q 107. Give a brief account of the main dramatic works of John Galsworthy (1867—1933).

Ans: John Galsworthy was one of the greatest literary figures of the 20th century. He was a novelist, an essayist, a short story writer, a critic and a dramatist of repute. His main dramatic works are the following:—

* A. C. Ward: Twentieth Century Literature
** Lynton Hudson: The Twentieth Century Drama,
† David Daiches: A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II.
The Silver Box.

This book presents a criticism of the law prevailing in England during his times. It deals with the old criticism of British Law so pointedly referred to by Goldsmith in his Traveller that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. Galsworthy tries to show in the Silver Box that law can be purchased by the power of wealth and he seems to re-echo the lines of Goldsmith in the Traveller:

Laws grind the poor,
The rich men rule the Law.

Jack Barthwick, the son of a rich M. P. commits the same crime of stealing as Jones, the poor man, but Jones is punished whereas Jack is allowed to go scot free. "Both father and son realize perfectly that Jones is being badly treated, that he and Jack should in a just society, have received the same punishment, but circumstances will it otherwise. The one is a rich man's son; the other is a nobody. Society, that invisible presence, determines that the rich shall be preferred to the poor." (Nicoll).

The Strife.

Galsworthy's Strife is a beautiful indictment of the present structure of industrial society. It presents the strife between capital and labour, and advocates better understanding between these two great forces of our industrial life. The leader of the capitalist is Antony and the leader of the labourers is Roberts. Galsworthy points out that in the interest of industrial harmony both capitalists and labourers should work in unison and should not unnecessarily fight for their rights. There should be reconciliation between the two parties since unnecessary strikes and lock-outs hamper the progress of industrial life and retard production.

The Show.

In this play, Galsworthy records his opposition to the press and to the general behaviour of journalists who make scandal of the public life of people by unnecessarily bringing their private affairs into the public eye. This play is a great attack upon the press which Galsworthy has so strongly criticised in his other novels and dramas such as Maid in Watling.
"In *Show* the press is pilloried mercilessly and Galsworthy pleads for good sense for those who are manning the press today."

The Skin Game.

*The Skin Game* is a criticism of the war. In this play Galsworthy presents his indictment of the Great War in an allegorical manner. The symbolism, which Galsworthy generally eschewed, is presented in this play. The situation is worked out in such a way that frequently it runs parallel to the situation of the War.

The Forest.

In this play, Galsworthy exposes the evils of our capitalistic society. It gives a picture of financiers and their unscrupulous ways and dishonest dealings in society. Galsworthy shows in this play that our industrial life is like a forest or a wilderness in which capitalists prowl like lions without any restraint upon the unwary and innocent people, ignorant of their financial tricks.

The Joy.

In *Joy* Galsworthy presents various forms of egoistic prejudices, delusion and numerous other vices that eat into the vitals of our life. Galsworthy wants to show in this play that most of the troubles in our life rise on account of egoism, selfishness, prejudices and lack of sympathy.

A Family Man.

This is a domestic drama and in this play Galsworthy attacks the misuse of authority and exposes its harmful consequences in domestic life. The dramatist very cleverly shows that too much exhibition of authority on the part of the elders is bound to lead to rebellion in the young hearts of grown up people. He suggests that undue authority should not be exercised and elders in the family should exercise restraint in the use of authority over their subordinates. The play is absurdly improbable and even farcical, but it successfully derides the idea that man can treat the members of his family like a piece of property, and so points a moral which is brilliantly elaborated in *The Forsyte Saga*.

Justice.

*Justice* is a social tragedy and is one of the greatest works of Galsworthy. It is a plea for greater sympathy for the desertics and waifs of society. In this play Galsworthy shows that a man who
commits some theft under very straitened circumstances like Falder
should not be subjected to the course of law, because it is our
society that is responsible for turning innocent people into sinners.
The speech of Frome in the court of law represents Galsworthy's
attitude towards the subject of justice and law courts. In short, it
is a play that deals with the problems of the criminal and the
treatment of society towards such criminals.

The Mob.

In the Mob, Galsworthy presents the mentality of the mob,
its obstinacy and its unthinking mind. It is the story of an idealist
who stands against the mob and who is ultimately defeated by the
forces of the mob. In this tragedy Galsworthy shows how idealists
and visionaries are crucified at the altar of mob mentality.
Galsworthy's great dislike for mob mentality is expressed in these
words in the drama.

"You—mob, are most contemptible thing under the
sun. You are the thing that pelts the weak; kicks women;
hurls down free speech. This is today, that to-morrow.
Brain you have none. Spirit—not the least of it."

These words against the mob represent the spirit of this play.

A Bit of Love.

In this play Galsworthy presents the tragedy of an idealist
who is misunderstood by the world. It is the story of an idealist
whose principles of life are far higher than the understanding
of ordinary people in our society. The idealist has to suffer a
lot at the hands of the people because he is not willing to sacrifice
the high principles of his life. Galsworthy tries to show in this
play that any one willing to stick to high principles must be ready
to suffer opposition and persecution in his life. However, the
lesson underlying this play is that in the ordinary course of life
idealism should not be carried too far because it does not pay to
be an extreme idealist in the world of realities.

The Eldest Son.

The Eldest Son is a social tragedy based upon caste feeling.
The subject of this tragedy is that strong family traditions and
prestige must be maintained at all costs and should not be
sacrificed for any feelings. Conscience can be sacrificed at the altar
of family prestige and traditions.
Loyalties.

Galsworthy’s *Loyalties* is a play in which the dramatist deals with the subject of caste prejudice or caste feelings. It is a cry against racial prejudice shown by the Christians to one Captain Dancy, a Jew. Different kinds of loyalties are presented in this play. The most noticeable being the loyalty to race, loyalty to friendship; professional loyalty and lastly the loyalty to married life.

*Foundations.*

In *Foundations*, Galsworthy teaches that a religion of kindness is the only remedy for removing the evils caused by caste prejudices and caste feelings. He advocates sympathy and charity for the suffering people and this play pleads for imaginative sympathy for the waifs and derelicts of society. The same idea is carried further in another play *Escape*. In both these plays, Galsworthy presents the true spirit of humanity which he regards as the negation of caste feeling.

These are the prominent plays of John Galsworthy and anyone, desiring to have a thorough understanding of Galsworthy should read R. H. Coats’s book *Galsworthy As A Dramatic Artist*. The plays of Galsworthy have been discussed by Coats under the following heads:—

(1) Plays of Family Relationships (Joy—A Family Man)
(2) Social Injustice (The Silver Box; The Show, The Forest).
(3) The Tragedy of Idealism.
(4) Plays of Class and Caste Feeling.

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Q. 108. Give your estimate of John Galsworthy as a Dramatist.

Ans. John Galsworthy was one of the greatest dramatists of the school of realism and naturalism in drama, and played a conspicuous part in popularising the Problem Play in the twentieth century. He was a dramatist of social life and concentrated his attention on problems facing us in society. He found his material and inspiration in the world of everyday life and affairs, and described himself as a painter of pictures, a maker of things, as sincerely as I know how, imaginatively out of what I have seen and
felt.* Leaving aside *The Little Dream*, he maintained a realistic attitude in his dramas consistently and it was his avowed object as a dramatist to deal with the actual facts and conditions of contemporary life, instead of making excursions into the realms of fancy and romance. Like the Scottish dramatist Barrie, Galsworthy was wedded to the actual and tried to present as faithfully as he could the phenomena of life and character without fear, favour or prejudice. He made no attempt to glorify and embellish the dreary realities of a dull life with the false colours of romance, but strove to create an illusion of actual life on the stage “as to compel the spectator to pass through an experience of his own, to think and make and write with people he saw thinking, talking, and moving in front of him.”† His work is rooted in contemporary life and provides a vivid and fairly accurate picture of the conditions society of the times in which he lived. He has defined art as “the perfect expression of self in contact with the world”, and his dramatic art at least is based on his reaction to the world at large.

He is the critic and the interpreter of contemporary English life in his dramas. In his plays we have a fine discussion of the problems of marriage, sex relationship, labour disputes, administration of law, solitary confinement, caste feeling or class prejudice. In *Silver Box* and *Justice*, he deals with the problem of justice and the cruel working of the legal machinery. In *Strife* he concentrates on the conflict between capital and labour, and in *The Skin Game* he brings out the conflict between the landed gentry and the new capitalistic class. The main plays of Galsworthy deal with social problems. These varied problems of our social life are treated by Galsworthy in relation with the social organism as a whole. Ibsen had also dealt with problems in his dramas, but he treated social problems in relation to the individual or the family. Shaw occasionally dealt with the problems of the individual in relation with society, but Galsworthy always discussed problems in relation to social organism.

**His Impartiality and Detachment.**

Galsworthy deals with the problems of life with impartiality.

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* Life and Letters of J. Galsworthy Ed. by H. V. Marrut.
† Galsworthy: ‘Some Platitudes Concerning Drama’
He is an artist and takes a detached view of the problems, though by probing deeply we can feel his sympathy with one side or the other. But as a rule he examines both sides of the case with equal carefulness and presents them without expressing any opinion. He strikes the note of impartiality in the following words, “Let me try to eliminate any bias and see the whole thing as should an umpire, one of those pure things in white coats; purged of all the prejudices, passions and predilections of mankind. Let me have no temperament for the time being. Only from an impersonal point of view, there be such a thing am I going to get even approximately at the truth.” While presenting the picture of contemporary life, he keeps himself in the background. He does not allow his own personality to intrude into his dramas. In his plays he has always tried to present both sides of a problem with strict impartiality. To maintain balance and poise in his dramatic technique, he has not been swept off his feet by emotion. He might be emotionally sympathetic to this character or that, to this class or the other, but as a dramatist he successfully checks the temptation of treating any particular character with undue partiality.

In his *Silver Box* Jones, an unemployed young man, steals a silver purse in a fit of drunkenness, from Jack Barthwick, the idle son of a wealthy Liberal M. P. We can hardly blame Jones for this trifling crime when unemployment was prevalent everywhere and when even Jack Barthwick himself could steal the silver purse from an unknown lady and go unpunished by law. But a strictly impartial judge like Galsworthy cannot allow this crime to go unpunished, though he allows Jones to have his full say and hints at the fact that there were two laws prevalent at that time, one for the rich and the other for the poor, and Jones because he is poor, cannot hope for that justice which he could easily buy if he were rich. “If Galsworthy had been made of cheaper clay he would have made the Barthwicks unspeakable villains, and the Joneses the innocent victims. But old Barthwick is a well meaning man, and Jones is a scoundrel and a wife-beater. There is good and bad on both sides. The balance is made as fair as the dramatist can make it.”

* J. W. Marriott: Modern Drama.
In 

also the balance is kept intact with perfect impartiality. The dramatist presents both sides of the case. He presents the case for Capital and Labour with strict impartiality. In the play the scales are held dispassionately and the readers only feel the futility of the tragic pride and prejudice on both sides; the side of Anthony, the capitalist and Roberts, the labour leader.

Instances can be multiplied to show Galsworthy's impartial approach to the problems of life. As an artist he kept his impartiality admirably well, with the result that his plays seem inconclusive. There is no finality about them.

Galsworthy's Sympathy and Humanity.

Though Galsworthy presents his situations and characters with impartiality, yet, if we go deep down in his plays, we can detect his sympathy for the down-trodden and the underdog in society. His sympathy extends even to animals. He has a Tolstoyan reverence for all life. Once the veil of this intellectual impartiality is lifted, the humanist in Galsworthy is clearly revealed, voicing his strongest protest against the cruelty and injustice of our society. The warmth of feeling could hardly be chilled by the cold touch of the necessities of dramatic art. The humanistic approach to life, and its problems is evident in almost all the plays of Galsworthy and the best example of it can be given from Justice. Galsworthy's sympathy is evidently with Falder. In the defence of the counsel for Falder, we feel the voice of Galsworthy himself. It appears to us that the dramatist has put off his lawyer's gown and is passionately appealing to consider the case of the accused with compassion. The judge may turn a deaf ear to the sentimental appeal of Mr. Frome, the lawyer for Falder, but it will never fail to find a sympathetic echo in the hearts of the readers and the audience, because the voice of the dramatist is presented through Frome. In this respect it is interesting to compare Galsworthy with Bernard Shaw. Shaw has actually more imaginative sympathy than is usually conceded to him, but his satiric gift, his genius for derision causes him to appear cynical. Shaw is carried away by his own views to such an extent that he fails to enter adequately into the view point of others. Galsworthy is never guilty of this lapse of dramatic sympathy and understand-
ing. Where Shaw would scoff and curse, Galsworthy would wince and ultimately find himself constrained to bless. "Shaw’s intellectualism runs to witty satire and attack; Galsworthy’s emotionalism leads rather to charity and sympathy and tolerance."

"Underlying the plot of each of Galsworthy’s plays, there is a broad current of intense humanity which preserves his work from the ravages of time. Strife is not an ephemeral pamphlet but a study of the spirit of diehardism, that robs men of their discretion, warps their judgment, and leads to bitter conflict and suffering. Justice deals with the blindness of the judicial system; it was blind in the Greeks and Romans and there is no reason to suppose it will not be blind in future. The system may change, but the lack of understanding and foresight shown by common humanity will persist, and lead to suffering such as was experienced by Falder."

Galsworthy’s moral purpose and reformative tone.

Galsworthy had infinite sympathy for his downtrodden and crushed characters. He was pained by the conditions prevailing in society, and it was his hearty desire to reform the evils of our social life. But Galsworthy could not be a blatant propagandist like Shaw. He suggested reform in his dramas, but the tone of the reformer is hushed and muffled. That he intended to introduce reform in society through his plays cannot be gainsaid. There is hardly any one of his plays which does not convey a message or a lesson. There is a moral note in each one of his plays. He believed that every work of art should have a moral or a "Spire of meaning." "A drama" he has himself pointed out, "must be so shaped as to have a spire of meaning. Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral and the business of the dramatist is to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day." Didacticism was the main spring of his art. His didacticism is not obtrusive. His dramas have, strictly speaking, not a moral which may be obtrusive but a spire of meaning which develops itself as naturally from the drama as a spire completes the structure of a Gothic church. The public gets this mea-

* Dr. R. C. Gupta: The Problem Play.
ning, not through a coarse melodramatic opposition of villain and hero (as in the older dramas), not even through any intellectual argument, but through emotional sympathy with characters presented in such a way as to appeal to the spectator’s sense of truth and justice.

In Strife the moral is that we should not be adamant and head-strong in our view but should seek honourable compromise over issues with cannot be resolved without sacrifice of principle. In Loyalties he denounces racial prejudice and pleads for just social treatment to all classes of people in society. In Silver-Box he desires to avoid the evils of unemployment and pleads for sympathy for the waifs and derelicts of society and so on.

Plot Construction

In his book The Inn of Tranquillity Galsworthy makes a pregnant observation about plot construction. He points out, “A good plot is that sure edifice which rises out of the interplay of circumstances on temperament and of temperament on circumstances, within the enclosing atmosphere of an idea.” The plots of Galsworthy’s plays are based on ideas and hang on characters. The stories of Galsworthy’s plays receive their significance from the characters and the ideas that are interwoven in them. Each play of Galsworthy has a theme, and every incident happening in the scene contributes to the furtherance of the theme. The theme is grounded on the idea evolved in the play.

Galsworthy’s plot construction is based on a situation or incident, and the reaction of a few characters to that situation. The loss of money in Loyalties is the starting point, and the play unfolds, as different characters present their reaction to the alleged charge of theft on Captain Dancy.

The plots of Galsworthy have real, critical, pleasant climaxes and surprises, that keep up the interest of the play and save them from being jejune and dull. R. H. Coats refers to the climax and surprises in Galsworthy’s plots in an admirable manner. He says, ‘On the whole, Galsworthy’s climaxes are good.’ They are not included in literary play, but where they do occur, they are reached naturally and inevitably by a kind of sure pointing forward and acceleration from the beginning.”
suspense is also maintained in his plays. In the Silver-Box our suspense is kept right to the end. We do not know whether Jack Barthwick would be punished in the same manner as Jones. In Loyalties we hold our breath till the perpetrator of the 91000 robbery is discovered. In Escape we are ill at ease so long as the fate of Denant is not decided. In Justice, when two advocates plead for and against Falder, we are kept in suspense till the judge announces judgment. There is a dexterous management of suspense in the Eldest Son where previous to the arrival of Sir William at a critical point in the play, the family anxiously discusses what his attitude to Bill and Freda is likely to be.

One special feature of Galsworthy's plot construction is the employment of the technique of parallelism. In Silver Box there is a parallelism between Jack and Jones, and the same is noticed in Skin Game between Hillerist and Harbowler.

Galsworthy's architectural instinct in plot construction is also a special feature of his art. He builds the structure of his plot like an architect. The edifice reared by him is perfect in harmony and symmetry. There is no lopsidedness in his plays. Each play stands as a perfect whole. Referring to this architectural quality of Galsworthy's plays J. W. Marriott remarks, "Galsworthy's architectural instinct for symmetry and poise was just a trifle too strong. The artistic conscience which controlled his writing corresponds to the social conscience which controlled his daily life."*

Characterisation.

Galsworthy's characters are drawn from common life. His personages range between the accidental thief and the middle class member of Parliament, the workman and the company director, the charwoman and the colonel wife. His heroes are common men and rarely do we come across in his tragic plays heroes of the dimension of King Lear, Macbeth or Othello.

Galsworthy's characters are evolved from the impact of situations. They advance and grow as the drama unfolds the idea underlying each play.

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* J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.
Galsworthy's characters are types rather than individuals. His characters are embodiments of certain ideas, and hence they tend to be types rather than individual figures.

Galsworthy's heroes and heroines are highly emotional. Emotion is the stuff of their life. The characters of Shaw are generally intellectual, and stand well contrasted with the emotional characters of Galsworthy. The characters of Galsworthy fail to give proper and adequate expression to their emotional feelings. They are subdued and fail to give proper ventilation to their feelings. "One cannot help contrasting Galsworthy's characters with those of Bernard Shaw, whose characters are all articulate to the point of volubility. There is no need to guess their emotions; they expound them with wonderful lucidity. But in the case of Galsworthy, it often happens that an incoherent ejaculation or a clumsy gesture is more eloquent than a fine speech because it hints at the unplumbed depths of agony suffered by the dumb animals of the human race."* There is much force in Galsworthy's own admission about his characters when he says, "About Shaw's plays one might say that they contain characters who express emotions which they do not possess. About mine one might say that they contain characters who possess emotions which they cannot express."

Broadly speaking the characters of Galsworthy are purely English. They are dominated by traits common to English men and women. There is little theatricality about them. They are the product of a naturalistic technique, and hence there is truth and verisimilitude in their presentation. We recognise the ordinary humanity in Galsworthy's characters. Schalit rightly remarks, "Galsworthy's characters are dire in action, never farfetched or self stultifying. They are always drawn from the average man and woman of our immediate surroundings. From the very outset he surrounds his characters with a peculiar atmosphere of its own and maintains it throughout and thus in each case has something faithful, something inevitable about it."

Galsworthy's thumb-nail sketches of characters introduced in stage direction are equally impressive. The hints presented

* J. W. Marriott: Modern Drama.
by the stage representation of characters are enough to make the character stand out before us in clear outline. Edward Fillarton is represented on the stage "as one of those clean-shaven naval men of good presence who has returned from sea but not from their susceptibilities."

In characterisation, Galsworthy scores a triumph over Bernard Shaw. The characters of the Shavian plays are all mouth-pieces through which the dramatist propagates his theories. They act and talk as the dramatist likes them to, and in their movements there is always some wire pulling from behind. As a result of this, the Shavian characters have been mere lifeless machines. But Galsworthy never allows his personality to intrude into his plays. His characters move and act according to dramatic needs. They have been brought down from an intellectual to a human level and as such they never cease to impress or interest us. "Since the characters must be deliberately posed in order to carry out a pattern they are hardly likely to be inspired with a life of their own. Perhaps this will explain why he has created few great personalities who have an existence outside the play-personalities like Cyrano de Bergerac, Peter Pan or Sir John Falstaff."*

Though Galsworthy has not been able to create characters of the same excellence as Shakespeare, yet he has also created some nice characters which may be taken as types rather than as individuals. We have such fine characters in Galsworthy as John Anthony in Strife, Mrs. Jones in The Silver Box; Falder in Justice, Captain Dancy in Loyalties and these characters cannot be forgotten. We shall always remember the stubborn rigidity of purpose in Anthony, Cordelia like simplicity and sincerity in Mrs. Jones, intense restlessness in Captain Dancy, and tragic irony in Falder.

Dialogues.

Galsworthy lays great emphasis on dialogues. In Some Platitudes Concerning Drama he writes about the importance of dialogue in an effective play—"The art of writing true dramatic dialogue is an austere art, denying itself all licence, grudging

* J. W. Marriott: Modern Drama.
every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, supposing all jokes and epigrams served from character, relying for fun and pathos as the fun and tears of life. From start to finish good dialogue is hand-made like good lace; clear, of fine texture, furthering with each thread the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated.”

The dialogues of Galsworthy are pointed and sharp though they lack the play of corruscating wit present in the sparkling dialogues of Bernard Shaw. Galsworthy’s dialogues are effective in the presentation of tragic emotion of a subdued character. His dialogues are generally short and to the point though there are long speeches as well here and there as Frome’s speech in Justice and Anthony’s defence of capitalism in Strife.

His Craftsmanship.

Galsworthy is a great craftsman in his dramatic art. He knows the art of plot construction, and of giving to his plot a keen sense of dramatic effectiveness. He manages his plots with economy, restraint and concentration. Every word beats on the action or reveals character or suggests the attitude which Galsworthy desires his spectators to take. The same artistic thrift is seen in his stage directions also. Stage directions in modern drama are always very important, but some dramatists, like Shaw, carry their stage directions to the length of an essay. Galsworthy never errs in this respect. He never says too much, but at the same time, he never omits any single detail which is important.

Galsworthy’s dramatic effectiveness.

We do not, however, claim for Galsworthy the Shakespearean genius of portraying that ‘double-conflict’, conflict with the elemental forces and simultaneously conflict with conscience, but nevertheless, this much credit must be given to Galsworthy that he has succeeded in creating some very fine dramatic moments by a few subtle hints and suggestions. Such dramatic moments are present in all his plays. In Strife the two unbending leaders of Capital and Labour respectively are deserted by their followers to force a compromise. They stare at each other and there is in

* J. Galsworthy; Some Platitudes Concerning Drama.
their looks a dramatic intensity that keeps us spell bound for sometime. Let us note the words—

Roberts: "Then you are no longer Chairman of this company? (Breaking into half-mad laughter) Ah ha-ah ha, ha! They've thrown you, over-thrown their chairman Ah-ha ha! (with a sudden dreadful calm) So they've done us both down, Mr. Anthony?"

"Anthony rises with an effort. He turns to Roberts, who looks at him. They stand several seconds, gazing at each other, fixedly; Anthony lifts his hand, as though to salute, but lets it fall. The expression of Robert's face changes from hostility to wonder......"

Play of Irony,

In Galsworthy's dramatic art Dramatic Irony as well as Irony of Life are presented with great care and astuteness. There is a note of irony in all his plays. It has become a part of Galsworthy's art. For example, in Justice the machinery which the Law has devised for dispensing justice, results in producing marked injustice. In Strife Capital and Labour come into collision causing untold suffering and wastage to all concerned. When both parties are thoroughly exhausted, they strive at a compromise, the terms of which are exactly the same as had been proposed before the quarrel began and which had been contemptuously rejected by both the parties then. Tench the Secretary, reveals the irony of the situation in the concluding lines of the drama.

Tench (staring at Harness—Suddenly excited. Do you know, Sir—these terms, they are the very sam we drew up together you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and what for?

Harness (In a slow grim voice)

That's where the fun comes in.

Conclusion.

The general effect left on our mind after reading Galsworthy's plays is one of despair and gloom. His dramatic world is mainly grey. His tragic plays are for the most part serious, even sombre. But he is not a pessimist. There is a ray of hope that the lot of human beings would be better in the world to come. He believes that the cause of tragedy in social life lies failure of
sympathy and imagination, and he hopes that human lot is capable of amelioration.

Q. 109 What is Galsworthy's conception of tragedy and irony? What brings about tragedy in his plays?

Ans. Galsworthy, unlike Bernard Shaw, had specialised in writing tragedies. Shaw is a comedian, and Galsworthy is a tragedian. The tragedies of human life exercised a powerful hold on Galsworthy's mind, and he produced social tragedies marked with irony and waste. His principal plays: *The Fugitive, The Mob, Justice, Loyalties* and *Old English* are all tragedies resulting in the deaths of the heroes. Other plays of Galsworthy, in which death does not occur but suffering is of an oppressive character, are *Silver Box, Skin Game* and *Strife*. They are all social tragedies. In the former five plays there is tragedy in the sense that the frustrated hero meets his tragic death in circumstances which produce gloom and despair. In the later three plays there is tragedy resulting in hardship, frustration and waste to the main characters of the play. In all the plays there is tragic gloom and despair, and a sense of frustration and waste overpowering us at the end.

What is the cause of all this tragic gloom and despair in Galsworthy's plays? Why do we have tragedies at all? Can they not be averted?

Galsworthy's tragic conception is different from the Greeks and the Elizabethan tragedy writers. The Greeks believed in the power of fate in bringing about tragedy. Gods were against poor mortals and hence they hurled thunder-bolts on them. Tragedy in human life was an act of divine dispensation resulting in gloom and despair in human life. The change in this fatalistic conception of tragedy upheld by the Greeks was sounded by the Elizabethans particularly by Shakespeare who believed that the cause of tragedy lay in some fatal flaw in the character of the hero. Tragedy was mainly the outcome of a person's own frailties. Gods and supernatural powers had little to do with human tragedies, though some uncontrollable circumstances added to the tragic happenings in the plays. The tragedy of Hamlet was principally due to his wavering and vacillating
nature. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth met their tragic doom due to over-ambition and Othello met his end as the result of his credulity.

Galsworthy's conception of tragedy is different both from the Greeks and the Elizabethans. Tragedy in Galsworthy is the outcome not so much of human frailties of character or divine dispensation, as the result of mal-social-adjustment and big social forces working against a weak human character. The tragic characters of Galsworthy, Falder, Jones, Dancy are weaklings, and it is not possible for them to defend themselves against forceful social forces which crush them at the end. No doubt, these tragic characters of Galsworthy have some flaws of character, but their little frailties would not have resulted in grim and gruesome tragedies if the mighty social forces had not been pitted against them. Galsworthy lays greater force on social machinery, particularly the legal machinery for dispensing justice for the cause of the tragedy than on the frailties of his characters. It is this over emphasis on social forces and institutions as the principal grinding force in human life that turns tragedies of Galsworthy into social tragedies. The cause of tragedy in Galsworthy's plays is the crushing nature of big institutions and big organizations pitted against the erring and yet feeble mortals.

In Silver Box, Jones and his wife suffer because the rolling engine of law crushes them. "The real villain is neither Jones nor Jack Barthwick, but the judicial system for which we are all responsible. The audience is in the docks confronted with the crime of having approved that system." In Justice Falder is the victim of a system of law that fails to distinguish a hardened criminal from a social weakling. The law crushes the miserable and the weak as it crushes the poor.

The tragedies of Galsworthy give the impression of tremendous waste. Poor characters like Jones and Falder are crushed mercilessly under a system that is rotten to the core. There is misery and suffering for all classes of people because we cannot set aright the vitiated legal machinery that oppresses the poor more than the rich. The sense of waste in Galsworthy's plays further brought about by unnecessary bickerings and struggles
among people without any sense of broad vision in life. Pugnacity in human nature is the cause of much waste and frustration in human life. In Strife, there is waste, suffering and tragedy among the poor labourers because of pugnacity, bickering and short-sightedness on the part of Anthony the leader of the capitalists. In the Skin Game there is waste due to a lack of understanding between the landed gentry and the new capitalistic class. Much of the waste in social life can be removed if human beings develop a sense of sympathy and mutual understanding.

Unfortunately human beings fail to develop the broad vision that might set things aright. Therein comes the play of irony in Galsworthy's tragedies. The irony in Justice is that the machinery which the Law has devised for dispensing justice results in producing marked injustice. In Strife Capital and Labour come into collision causing untold suffering to all concerned in the industry. When both parties are thoroughly exhausted, they strive at a compromise, the terms of which are exactly the same as had been proposed before the quarrel began and which had been contumuously rejected by both the parties then. Tench, the secretary, reveals the irony of the situation in the concluding lines of the drama.

"Tench (staring at Harness, suddenly excited) D'you know, Sir,—these terms, they're the very same we drew up together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and what for?"

Harness (in a slow, grim voice). That's where the fun comes in!"

There is always an undercurrent of irony in Galsworthy's tragedies which is more impressive than open denunciation of the social system. "Irony of ironies" says the dramatist, "all is irony." He leaves the audience to discover it.

"The irony in Galsworthy does not breed pessimism as it does in the novels of Hardy. Hardy's world is quite different from the world of Galsworthy. Hardy believes that not only the social institutions are malignant, but the whole universe is against the progress of man, virtue can never flourish, that Vice escapes without punishment. This dark dismal view of
nature is not shared by Galsworthy. He believes that there is no conscious ill will or malice in nature against man, but the social institutions man has set up are against his progress."

Galsworthy's tragedies are gloomy and the impression of greyness overpowers us. But the gloom is not cimmerian. There is some ray of hope that if human beings entrenched in power and authority cultivate sympathy and a humanitarian outlook and big institutions and social and legal machinery are reformed many social tragedies can be averted. This is the underlying hope in each one of Galsworthy's social tragedies.

Q. 110. "Galsworthy has no heroes and no villains." Discuss

Ans. The study of Galsworthy's social plays and social tragedies clearly reveals the absence of heroes found in classical tragedies of ancient Greece, Marlowian tragedies and the tragedies of Shakespeare during the Elizabethan age. In these old tragedies of a remote age the heroes were drawn from ranks of higher life, and were endowed with heroic qualities of valour, heroism, ambition and kingly glory. Eminent persons from the higher strata of life were the heroes of classical, Elizabethan, and Restoration heroic tragedies. Agamemnon, King Lear, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Aurengzeb were heroes in the real sense of the term. But in the case of Galsworthy we do not come across heroes of the type enunciated above. Galsworthy's heroes are drawn from the common stock of ordinary humanity and are subject to the failings and foibles to which all of us are subject. The heroes of Galsworthy are not men of superhuman strength like the heroes of the heroic tragedies of Dryden and Otway, nor are they fired withordinate ambition like Macbeth. They do not have the introspective and psychological ratiocination of Hamlet, nor do they have the incredible credulity of Othello. There is nothing of the intensely heroic in the heroes of Galsworthy like Jones, Falder, and Roberts.

Galsworthy's plays are problem plays. They are social tragedies, based upon the sorrows and sufferings brought about common men and women by the maladjustment of society and the evil social forces such as the system of legal justice prevalent in our society. In such tragedies a hero of the type
of Marlowian hero would have been out of place. Instead of submitting to the forces militating against his powerful ambition, he would have hurled defiance and stubbornly stood against all social inhibitions. Such a hero would have been out of place in a social tragedy like the Silver Box and Justice in which the hero is crushed by a powerful social machinery, particularly the machinery of legal dispensation that makes no difference between a hardened criminal and a weakling. For social tragedies, Galsworthy needed heroes, who were neither militant nor defiant, but meek, docile and easily expressible. The force of the social tragedies would have been lost if hero had been a powerful man going down after a bitter and uncompromising hostility against a ruthless social system. The force and pity of Galsworthy's social tragedies would have been lost in the presence of such heroes of fire and fury though ultimately signifying nothing. Hence to make his social tragedies pathetic and appealing to the better sense of humanity, he has created tragic heroes, who are weak, supine, nerveless, without anything of that greatness which Aristotle had outlined for tragic heroes in his Poetics. Galsworthy makes a pointed reference to the pathetic tone of Galsworthy's tragedies in the following lines, "The power of the law or the mob or capitalistic society so overwhelsms the individual, whether innocent or guilty, that he is rendered impotent. So disproportionate are the protagonists that struggle seems useless and tears are vain. The result is that whereas in classical and romantic tragedy the hero is so wrestless with fate or villainy that he rises superior to disaster even when overwhemed by it, and thus awakens in us feelings of admiration and reverential awe. Social tragedy of Galsworthy's type moves us rather to sentiments of compassion."

Let us examine a few heroes of Galsworthy. Jones in Silver Box is one type. He is a poor man and it is very difficult for him to make both ends meet. He has a wife and children. He tries to bring them up decently. In a moment of lassitude he picks up the silver box dropped by Barthwick. He is prosecuted for that, and he goes down whining under a leg system which he cannot oppose. He is the victim of social conventions, and he cannot powerfully raise his voice against the
Falder in *Justice* is another weakling. He commits forgery, but after that he has no stamina to stand the trial. He commits suicide at the end because he finds the social forces too strong for him. These tragic heroes of Galsworthy evoke pity and sympathy, rather than awe and administration. They do not struggle and as such they fail to win our applause. They are pathetic rather than heroic characters. They are the victims of a perverted and twisted social system.

These tragic heroes of Galsworthy are quite in keeping with the democratic traditions of the modern age. The twentieth century is the age of common man, rather than kings and princes. The common man of democracy has come into his own during the present century. In conformity with the needs of the time, dramatists have changed the ethos of drama. Galsworthy’s tragic heroes are common men, and they are presented in social relationship with the powerful social institutions and machinery working in society. Jones in *Silver Box* is a very common man, a servant in the Barchwick family. Falder is a clerk, who commits forgery in a state of social distress. He is a weakling. Even captain Dancy in *Loyalties* is not the brasshat, but a common soldier, who commits suicide at the end. All these heroes of Galsworthy are common men and are the product of the modern democratic and socialistic age. They are the products of the modern age of realism and tragic waste. They could not have been created in any other age except our own. Coats has rightly touched on the social, democratic, and realistic aspects of Galsworthy’s heroes in the following words, “Galsworthy usually refuses to heighten his characters by putting them on pedestals or exalting them to more than ordinary proportions. To do this would be an offence against realism and would at the same time involve a failure to emphasize the social aspect of modern tragedy. Accordingly he makes the majority of his characters mediocre and even mean, that we may the more readily recognise in them our ordinary selves.”*

Just as there are no tragic heroes of the dimensions of the tragic heroes of the Restoration heroic tragedies or tragic hero

*Coats: Galsworthy*
of the Elizabethan times, similarly there is the absence of powerful and crooked villains like Iago and Bosola in Galsworthy's social tragedies. The question of unmitigated villains like Iago and Edmund does not arise when there are no heroes matching their subtlety and crooked ingenuity. The classical conception of a villain is neither accepted by Galsworthy nor practised by him in his tragedies. Galsworthy seems to follow Meredith's dictum:

*In tragic life, God wot
No villain need be! passions spin the plot.*

The role of the villain in Galsworthy's social tragedies is taken by society and the audience. In place of one single individual who plays the role of the villain in bringing about tragedy, like Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*, the vitiated and corrupted social system and the audience that tolerate it constitute the villain in Galsworthy's social tragedies. Take for example *The Silver Box*. Who is the villain in this tragedy? The villain is neither Jack Barthwick nor his father, but the vitiated social machinery that brings untold misery to the poor and shields the rich from the iron clutches of law. J.W. Marriott directs our attention to the villain in *Silver Box*. He says, "The real villain is neither Jones nor Jack Barthwick, but the judicial system for which we are all responsible. The audience is in the dock, confronted with the crime of having approved that system."* The same is applicable to *Justice*. Here the villain is again the big and yet hollow machinery of law that fails to make a distinction between the hardened criminal and the spineless weakling like Falder. In Galsworthy's plays there are no die-hard villains who seek to bring the downfall of the hero through evil stratagems and machinations of their own like Edmund in *King Lear* and Iago in *Othello*.

Q 111. "This might be said of Shaw's plays that he creates characters who express feelings which they have not got. It might be said of mine that I create characters who have feelings which they cannot express." (Galsworthy) Discuss.

Ans. Galsworthy makes a subtle and appreciative distinc-

* J. W. Marriott: Modern Drama.
tion between the characters created by Bernard Shaw and his own self in his plays. There is much truth in Galsworthy's observation about the Shavian and Galsworthyian characters.

The characters of Bernard Shaw are generally speaking intellectual and rational. They are dominated by wit and intellectuality rather than by emotions and sentiments. They are the creations of the intellect rather than pure passion and emotion. They are forced to express feelings and emotions which they do not strongly feel, but which they are required to express just for the exigencies of the stage. They express their supposed or real emotions with exuberance and lucidity.

The characters of Galsworthy, on the other hand, are not intellectual or witty, but creatures of emotion and passion, which they cannot adequately express in words. Their hearts are full of emotion and powerful feelings, but they are not the masters of language and emotional expression.

This distinction between the characters of Shaw and Galsworthy is nicely presented by J. W. Marriott in *Modern Drama*. He says, "There is always conflict in Galsworthy's drama, and there is always an undercurrent of irony which is more impressive than open denunciation. The characters are unable to express their sense of wrong, but their very inarticulateness is moving. One cannot help contrasting these methods with those of Mr. Bernard Shaw, whose characters are all articulate to the point of volubility. There is no need to guess their emotions; they expound them with wonderful lucidity. But it often happens (as in the case of Galsworthy's characters) that an incoherent ejaculation or a clumsy gesture is more eloquent than a fine speech because it hints at the unplumbed depths of agony suffered by the dumb animals of the human race."

Let us first examine a few characters of Bernard Shaw. Take up the case of Raina and Bluntschli in *Arms and the Man*. Most of them are intellectual characters, and though they express emotions of love, yet we can certainly feel that the emotional expression is forced rather than an outcome of powerful

* J. W. Marriott: *Modern Drama.*
feelings of love and sentiment. Bluntschli is a practical soldier and is not the creature of emotion. He loves Raina, but he is never exuberant and emotional in his expression. Raina, too, is a creature of the intellect though she is a woman and ought to have more of emotion than intellect. Her emotional feeling expressed to Sergius seem to be forced. Shaw has purged both these characters of mere sentiment, and has made them witty and sharp. In Candida, the heroine is not the creature of emotions, though she is lost in the tangle of love between her husband Morell and her admirer Marchbank. She is not passionate. The emotions expressed by her with lucidity are not felt in the blood but felt in the soul. She gives expression to her emotions which are not deeply felt. Her emotions are under the control of her commonsense. In Man and Superman, emotion is suppressed by discussion and philosophical disquisition on the value of life force. Ann and Tanner are the creatures of a theory, and voice Shaw's feelings about life force. The emotion of love that superficially binds them is not given a heart felt expression. In Apple Cart, King Magnet is an intellectual character, and the manner in which he upsets the apple cart of the Prime Minister Proteus clearly shows the dominance of his intellect over emotion. He is also an emotional creature and has his love affair with a lady of questionable morality. His expression of love to that lady is more intellectual than emotional, and the flow of emotion is suppressed by the rush of philosophical wisdom embodied in the expression.

The characters of Galsworthy are more emotional than intellectual creatures. Galsworthy’s plays are social tragedies and tragic emotion in them is well saturated even to the deepest core of the play. His theme is intellectual, some social problems that need intellectual handling, but in the course of the manipulation of the plot, the intellectual tone is hushed and muffled by humanitarian or emotional considerations. His characters grapple with the problem on an intellectual plain, but soon emotion and sentiment overpower them, and the intellectual tone is subdued by the emotional temper. In Loyalties the play starts with the problem of theft. It is a highly complicated situation. How could the money of De Levis be stolen when it was kept
at a safe place? It is a case for the Scotland Yard police, and needs a Sherlock Holmes to unravel the mystery. But as the play moves ahead this intellectual tone is subdued, and the emotional and sentimental side come on the surface. All the characters are swayed away by emotions. The emotion of Christian brotherhood leads them to denounce De Levis, the Jew. They are swept away by the force of racial discrimination, and lose themselves in denunciation of the Jew. But they do not have language to express their emotion of hatred for the Jew in the same language in which Gratiano and Antonio express the hatred for the Jew, Shylock, in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice. Their emotional exuberance is not adequately expressed in words. They have feelings of hatred for the Jew, but they cannot properly express that feeling. That is the tragedy not only of the Christians but also of De Levis the Jew, who cannot adequately express himself in defence of his race. His emotional feelings for the Jewish race do not have that exuberance of expression which we come across in the utterances of Shylock the Jew. We can illustrate these remarks about the Christian characters of the play as well as the Jew from the following lines from the play. Canygne denounces the Jew, but his emotional fervour is without the fervour it ought to have. He says, "I have some knowledge of the world. Once an accusation like this passes beyond these walls no one can see the consequences. Captain Dancy is a gallant fellow, with a fine record as a soldier; and only just married. If he's as innocent as Christ, mud will stick to him, unless the real thief is found. In the old days of sword, either you or he would not have gone out of this room alive. If you persist in this accusation, you will both go out of this room dead in the eyes of society, you for bringing it, he for being the object of it." De Levis is better in expression of emotion than Canyge, but even he does not come to the level of Shylock. His words, "Society! Do you think I don't know that I'm only tolerated for my money. Society can't add injury to insult and have my money as well, that's all. If the notes are restored I'll keep my mouth shut; if they're not, I shan't. I am certain I am right." There is sincerity in what De Levis says, but the ring of emotional fervour is wanting in them.
We can turn to *Silver Box*. The utterances of Mrs. Jones and Mr. Jones lack emotional fervour. They speak in a manner which brings out their emotional excitement, but the words uttered by them are not hot like lava. They are cold like the burnt-out cinders. Here is an example. Mr. Jones speaks his mind to the magistrate, "I have to do no more than wot he, as I'm a poor man. I've got no money and no friends—he's a toff—he can do what I can't." Mr. Barthwick's sympathy for the poor is also pitched in a subdued key. Here are his words, "This prosecution goes very much against the grain with me. I have great sympathy with the poor. In my position I am bound to recognize the distress there is amongst them. The condition of the people leaves much to be desired."

In *Justice* the expressions of Falder are emotional, but their expression is not fervid. Falder is a weakling and cannot give adequate expression to his feelings.

Many other examples can be given from Galsworthy's plays to show that his characters are emotional, but they cannot give full-blooded and fervent expression to their feelings. There are many characters in Galsworthy's plays who suffer silently without any protest. There are scenes where characters stand without saying a word, though the atmosphere is surcharged with emotional fervour and needs forceful expression. Galsworthy's characters are highly strung and emotional in their make-up, but they cannot adequately express their pent-up feelings in a language that may take the audience off its feet, and win applause for their fervid oratory. The characters leave the impression not of emotional starvation, but lack of proper expression. More is meant in their utterances than meets the ear. They are suggestive, and their emotional speeches should be interpreted in a sympathetic manner. Then alone can we understand the full significance of Galsworthy's emotional characters.

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**Q. 112.** Give a brief account of the main plays of Bernard Shaw (1856—1950)

**Ans.** Bernard Shaw has written a number of plays. The following are the prominent plays of the celebrated dramatist:—

*Widowers' Houses* (1892), *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida*

Let us critically examine some of the plays.

1. **Widowers’ Houses** (1892).

Shaw’s first play *Widowers’ Houses* was not finished till 1892, although he had made an unsuccessful effort at dramatic collaboration with William Archer seven years earlier. This play is written on the subject of slum landlordism. Shaw himself describes it thus: “I perversely distorted it to be a grotesquely realistic exposure of slum landlordism, municipal jobbery, and the pecuniary and matrimonial ties between them and the peasant people with ‘independent’ income who imagine that such sordid matters do not touch their own lives.” This satirical invention of the author was combined with a good deal of farcical triviality with the result that a serious subject was treated with a degree of annoying non-seriousness. This play should be described as an economic treatise in dramatic form. The characters are mostly and intentionally represented as hypocrites and humbugs. The English men brought out in this play are obtuse, thick-skinned, unimaginative and humourless. These Englishmen, like Coke, ‘might be compared with the buffoons of an earlier tradition: the Vice of the medieval drama and the Fool of the Elizabethan before the Fool had been transformed by Shakespeare from a buffoon into a philosophic and poetic genius.”

2. **The Philanderer.**

It is a telling satire upon physical science, though enlivened with fine strokes of comedy. Dr. Paramore is a young strenuous physician, who has discovered a new disease, and is delighted when he finds people suffering from it and cast down to despair when he finds that it does not exist. In other words, it is a sharp exposure of the dangers of ‘idealism’, the sacrifice of people to principles. He points out that excessive idealism exists nowhere
so much as in the realm of physical science. The scientist is to be more concerned about sickness than about the sick. This theme of Dr. Paramore’s disease is at once a most far philosophic thing in the play.

3 Mrs. Warren’s Profession.

It is a play based on the theme of prostitution. G. Chesterton comments on it thus: “It is concerned with a co mother and a cold daughter: the mother drives the ordinary dirty trade of harlotry; the daughter does not know till the atrocious origin of all her own comfort and refinement. daughter, when the discovery is made, freezes up into an ice of contempt, which is indeed a very womanly thing to do. The mother explodes into pulverizing cynicism which is very womanly. The dialogue is drastic and sweeping; daughter says the trade is loathsome; the mother answers that she loathes it herself; that every healthy person does loathe trade by which she lives. And beyond question the general effect of the play is that the trade is loathsome; suppose anyone to be so insensible as to require to be told of the fact. Undoubtedly, the upshot is that a brothel is a miserable business and a brothel keeper a miserable woman. The whole drama of Shaw is, in the literal sense of the word, tragic comic mean that the comic part comes after the tragedy. On account of the theme of the play ‘it was banned by the Censor of play and aroused a storm of protest from several quarters.’

4. Arms and the Man.

It was acted for the first time in April, 1894. It is an amusing exposure of the glory of war and romantic love. Story is based on an incident in a war between Bulgaria and Austria in 1885. The Petkoffs, represent an aristocratic Bulgarian family consisting of Major Petkoff, his wife Catherine and daughter Raina whose head is full of romance and who is in love with Sergius claimed to be a military hero. Into this city enters a common soldier, Bluntschli, a Swiss, who has joined the Serbian army as a mercenary soldier. He has no illusion about war, places the naked truth about it when he happens to seek shelter in Raina’s bedchamber one night from the truth of shooting of the Bulgarians. “The Swiss soldiers behaved as if
maintained a soldier actually does behave, not as the conventions of Victorian melodrama would have a soldier behave; the play exhibited what Shaw called "natural morality" as against the "romantic morality" of those who objected to it. The plot is cleverly developed to show that the hero of Raina's dreams, Sergius is really a humbug, and his so called military exploits and glory are mere sham. He is not only a false hero on the battlefield but also in love. Though in love with and engaged to Raina, he flirts with the servant-maid Louka. In course of time it is found out that Raina herself cares more for her 'chocolate cream soldier,' Bluntschli, than for her professed lover, Sergius. Thus Shaw tears the mask off the face of sentimentality surrounding war and the equally foolish approach to love. Shaw's satire is summed up in the words of Sergius, "Oh, war the dream of Patriots and heroes—a fraud, Bluntschli. A hollow sham, like love."

Caesar and Cleopatra.

*Caesar and Cleopatra* is a puritanical play based on war against romance and heroism. In this play Shaw has produced a play of artistic creation in the portrait of Caesar. Caesar is a Shavian hero. Shaw represents Caesar not so much as "best riding the earth like a colossus," but rather walking the earth with a sort of stern levity, lightly touching the planet and yet spurring it away like a stone. *Caesar and Cleopatra* is a noteworthy play from many points of view. It began a new way of handling historical subjects, material, informal, humorous, yet full of meaning. The play contains many brilliant scenes and fine phrases. There is no play of Shaw more certain to hold its own on the British stage. "This play does not aim at proving any general proposition, and comes much nearer to being a play than most of his works written in dramatic form."

6. Man and Superman

With the appearance of this play in 1903, Shaw proved himself a fully matured dramatist. His apprenticeship in the realm of drama was over; and he was able to tackle the theatre and the dramatic form with unqualified success. In *Man and Superman*, observes Ward "the ideas are more memorable than the character, and there is little reliance upon stage situation; but the tremen-
dous stirring of moral and intellectual passion is compensation enough.” Described by the author as “A Comedy and a Philosophy' this play was Bernard Shaw’s earliest full statement of his conception of the way of salvation for the human race through obedience to the Life Force, the term he uses to indicate a power continually working upon the hearts of men and endeavouring to impel them towards better and fuller life. “Unlike Hardy’s Immanent Will, Shaw’s Life Force is represented as a power making consciously towards a state of existence far more abundantly vital than anything yet experienced by mankind. But the Life Force does not purpose to work unaided: Men and women are required to act as willing and eager agents for the furtherance of its great work. The existing race of men, however (so Shaw thought in 1903) was too mean-spirited and too self-centred to serve the Life-Force, which would consequently be compelled to supersede Man by a more effective instrument of its will—the Superman. The means likely to be adopted for the production of that higher type were suggested in Man and Superman, where woman is indicated as “Nature’s contrivance for perpetuating its achievement and Man as “woman’s contrivance for fulfilling Nature’s behest,” that the Superman should be born to replace the existing “feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances.”


Shaw’s doctrine of the Life Force is developed further in two plays—Heartbreak House and Back to Methuselah (1921). In Heartbreak House he gives forth a terrible warning that ‘cultured and leisured Europe will meet its doom if it did not undertake the mission of the Life Force. This play, begun in 1913, proved to be prophetic. It was completed in 1919 and by that time Europe had witnessed the holocaust of the World War. A generation which ignored the purposes of the Life Force was like the drunken skipper to whom comes “the smash of the ship on the rocks, the splintering of rotten timbers; the tearing of her rusty plates, the drowning of the crew like rats in a trap.”


In Back to Methuselah Shaw once again considered the purpose of the Life Force and pronounced a great warning that
if Man did not come up to the mark he would be replaced by another set of beings. Shaw’s doctrine in this respect was contrary to the theory of Natural Selection expounded by Darwin. Shaw wrote, “This does not mean that if man cannot find the remedy, no remedy will be found. “The power that produces Man when the monkey was not up to mark, can produce a higher creature than Man if man does not come up to the mark.” What it means is that of man is to be saved, Man must save himself. “The play is pretentious and dull showing a most undramatic desire to reduce all human life to disembodied speculation.” It lays emphasis on creative evolution.

9. Apple Cart

In this play Shaw deals with the problem of monarchy in a democratic country like England. He comes to the conclusion that the attempt to do away with the institution of monarchy represented by King Magnus in the play will ultimately spell ruin in society. The king is necessary to exercise a check on the activities of democratic leaders. In this play Shaw is neither opposed to monarchy nor democracy but to capitalism, and his diatribes are directed against Baxiages and Company that stands in the way of all social and economic progress. “The Apple Cart is one of the wisest and most genial pieces, wise not so much because of the political acumen of King Magnus as for the dieta on the art of self-sufficingness in the opening dialogue and on the art of human relationships in the interlude, which is also a passage of sparkling comedy rarely equalled in the modern English theatre.”

10. Cándida.

It is in some ways Shaw’s masterpiece. It tackles a domestic problem and shows that it is not sentimentalism but intelligence that governs life. This explains why Cándida eventually chooses the strong man Morel and not the poet, Marchbank, her sentimental lover.

11. John Bull’s Other Island

In this play Shaw is directing his satire at the conventional Englishman, who is never so silly or sentimental as when he sees silliness and sentiment in the Irishman. Broadbent, the hero of the play, is an Englishman, who believes that he brings reason
in treating the Irishmen, whereas in truth they are all smiling at his illusions.

"This play" observes Ward, "remains one of his most effective pieces, displaying his dramatic power-mastery of rhetoric and exalted prose, effective handling of stage situation, skill in depicting character and sense of comedy."

12 Major Barbara.

It reveals the materialistic pessimism of Shaw. Here he depicts poverty as the epitome of all vices. 'People say that poverty is no crime; Shaw says that poverty is a crime. It is a crime to endure it, a crime to be content with it, that it is the mother of all crimes of brutality, corruption and fear.' Here the dramatist shows that even the noblest enthusiasm of the girl who becomes a Salvation Army Officer fails under the brute money power of her father who is a modern capitalist. The political philosophy of Major Barbara is essentially Marxist.

13 On the Rocks.

In this latest play On the Rocks Shaw returns to the subject of democracy though he changes the metaphor and also thinks of new plots and plans of attack. In his comedy he shows how a programme of socialism is acceptable only to aristocrats and is rejected by the leaders of the proletariat. The play is a failure both as an exposition of Shaw's philosophy and as a work of art.

14 Saint Joan.

Saint Joan is one of the greatest works of Shaw. Here he presents the life of the French girl St. Joan who defied British power and fought valiantly for the freedom of her country. Saint Joan is captured and is burnt as a witch. Later on the greatness of Saint Joan is understood by the people and she is canonised in the Christian Church. The play is on a great subject and has a grandeur of style fully worthy of it. The trial scene in this play is one of the greatest scenes in the whole of dramatic literature.

"In Saint Joan Bernard Shaw reaches a higher level than elsewhere because for once the grander emotions are involved and the theme is a universal one lending itself to tragic drama."

Other Plays.

Getting Married is a scathing criticism of home life as it
existed in Shaw's time. Shaw seeks to point out the evils of maladjustment in home life in this play. You Never Can Tell is a satire on the authority of parents. The Doctor's Dilemma is a skit on men of science. In Androcles and the Lion Shaw pleads for drastic redistribution of wealth. The Man of Destiny is a historical play on the life of Napoleon. Contemporary social conventions are held up to ridicule in Pygmalion and Shakespeare forms the subject of The Dark Lady of the Sonnets.

Q. 113. Give your estimate of Bernard Shaw as a Dramatist.

Ans. Bernard Shaw was one of the greatest dramatists of the 20th Century, and by some critics he is considered next to Shakespeare in the hierarchy of English dramatists. At the time when Shaw made his debut on the English stage, drama was slowly struggling to rise from the torpor into which it had fallen during the nineteenth century. The period between 1779 and 1876 is dramatically barren and hardly a play produced during this sterile period has survived except as a literary curiosity. It was Shaw's great contribution that he gave to English drama a new life-force which it had lacked even in the hands of revivalists like Arthur Henry Jones and Pinero. He created not only the new drama of the 20th century, the drama of ideas and problems but also prepared the audience ready to accord a hearty welcome to what the dramatists of the new age were intending to give to the public. He revolutionised the whole concept of drama as it was supposed to be in the earlier ages and made it essentially a medium of discussion and reform, rather than pure relaxation and fun. It was Shaw's great achievement that he gave the air of seriousness and purposiveness* to drama without sacrificing the element of fun and gaiety that the audience hungrily craved for. He gave his philosophic pills a nice sugar coating of joyousness and fun.

Shaw had begun his career as a dramatic critic quite in

* 'I always have to preach. My plays all have a purpose' (Bernard Shaw).
the style of William Archer, but he failed to bring about the
regeneration that he sought to introduce in the field of drama.
"Finally, having for three a half-years made mincemeat of the
sentimentalities and essential falsities that contemporary drama-

tists continued to offer to their convention-ridden audiences, and
seeing no sign of a regeneration, he abandoned criticism, and,
more from a sense of duty than vocation, set out to show that he
could do what he had upbraided Pinero and his school of drama
for not doing."* Before turning seriously to dramatic production,
Shaw tried his hand at fiction and wrote five novels; *Immaturity
(1879), The Irrational Knot (1880), Love Among the Artist
(1881), Cuchel Byron’s Profession and the Unsocial Socialists
(1883), which failed to achieve the desired success. These were
regarded by Shaw as “The novels of my nonsense” and their cold
reception damped his enthusiasm for further production of works
of fiction. He turned to drama as his saviour and made it the
main forte of his literary career.

Why did Shaw write dramas?

The failure of Shaw as a critic and as a novelist brought
him to the field of drama, which was best suited to his genius.
The subjective conflict constantly proceeding in the soul of Shaw
between opposing elements, egoism and socialism, intellect and
instinct, reason and emotion, demanded an objective treatment
and for that purpose drama was the best medium. He had to
create characters to express outwardly one or the other point of
view that occurred to his mind. For this job the drama provides
him the suitable medium. He believed that the stage was the
finest instrument for the dissemination and discussion of ideas,
far superior to the school and the pulpit. Since Shaw had many
important things to say to his generation, he used the theatre as
the vehicle for his thoughts. He accepted the theatre as he found
it, and used it for the discussion of ideas reeling in his mind.

"His love for debating, in which he had shown how irresist-
tible it was for him to counter his arguments himself if no one
else would, influenced him towards choosing the kind of play in
which the characters undertake the dual task of proposer and

* Lynton Hudson: The Twentieth Century Drama.
opposer."* Shaw had at heart a bent for satire. Passing through almost exactly the same experiences as Dickens, he could not write a sympathetic study of the life of the London poor like David Copperfield. But he could pen satires burning with indignation like the *Widowers' Houses*. Verse and comedy are the two instruments of the satirist. If Shaw had lived in the days of Alexander Pope and the Heroic Couplet he would have probably written verse, but as he lived in the days of Oscar Wilde and the epigrammatic stage, he wrote plays, particularly comedies. His satiric genius gave a tilt to his dramatic art and made him a comedian rather than a tragedian in dramatic literature. But perhaps the predominating influence that urged Shaw to turn to the drama was the success of Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, who seemed to Shaw a close parallel to his own genius.

Shaw—the dramatist of ideas.

Shaw had certain ideas to present to the public through the medium of his plays. "He saw things as they are and had the courage to tell in compromising language exactly what he saw. He thought for himself, resolutely refused to accept ready-made opinions, and judged solely on evidence or on logic. He set his mind free from prejudice, superstitions, illusions, and popular delusions."** He had his original thoughts on contemporary problems as well as problems affecting humanity at large. He saw things with direct vision and altogether apart from the prejudice imposed by custom. He refused to be carried away by contemporary emotions by which the general public was swept off its feet. He had powerful and penetrating ideas to offer on a variety of subjects like slum landlordism, prostitution, natural Christianity, husband hunting, professional delusions and impostures, marriage, history, paradoxes of conventional society, questions of conscience, Darwinian evolution and Life-force. He fervently and fearlessly set forth his ideas in his dramas and hoped to convert the nation to his way of thinking through the medium of his plays.† Each drama of Shaw seeks to present his original ideas on the subject

* Dr. A. S. Collins: *English Literature of the 20th Century.*

** J. W. Marriott: *Modern Drama*

† 'I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinion'—Shaw.

Shaw as a Satirist, Iconoclast, Propagandist and Reformer.

Shaw was essentially a satirist, like Ben Jonson, and the avowed object of his art as a dramatist was to break conventional idols and fetishes and bring about healthy changes in the body politic of our society ridding it of the insidious cancers eating into its vitals. Shaw never bothered about the glorification of art for the sake of art. “Shaw had no conception of the drama as a literary art form in which the total pattern of meaning is achieved cumulatively and completely by the language put in the mouth of the characters as they talk to and interact with each other.” This is confirmed by his long and detailed stage directions, in which not only the action of his characters but their states of mind, emotions, tone or voice, and intentions are fully described as though in a novel. He never wrote for the mere glorification of art. “Art for art's sake is not enough. For art sake alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence,” observed Shaw in one of his writings, and true to his statement he never wrote for the sake of art but mainly for reforming the evils rampant in the society of his times. He subordinated his literary ability to a moral purpose. “He became the Knight of the Burning Pencil, a crusader whose appointed life-work was the endeavour to restore colour and light to England's once green and pleasant land.”* Through the mouth of Tanner in *Man and Superman* Shaw made his position clear as an iconoclast and reformer of the evils of our society. He stated through Tanner—“I have become a reformer and like all reformers an iconoclast. I no longer break cucumber frames and burn grass bushes. I shatter creeds and demolish idols.”

“The giants at which he tilts” says Scott James, “are

moral slavery, humbug, mental sloth, social apathy, superstition, sentimentalism, collective selfishness and all the static ideas which have not been consciously subjected to the test of real life and honest thought.” He behaved like a mountebank in his exposure of bad housing, bad education, bad conditions of labour, bad morals, and other social evils which troubled him so deeply. The objects of his satire include conventionalised religion and philosophy in Androcles and the Lion and in Back to Methuselah; social attitude towards sex relations in Mrs. Warren’s Profession, Candida and Man and Superman; military heroism in Arms and the Man and The Devil’s Disciple and professional charity in Major Barbara. Shaw was not satisfied with mere demolition of established idols, but on the debris of the razed buildings, he sought to build new buildings with open air atmosphere. “He is the great destroyer of evil in our modern age, and out of his destructiveness he seeks to lead us toward a newer, fresher, and more constructive thought.”

Shaw remained a propagandist in favour of certain ideas which he cherished in his mind. He made propaganda in favour of certain ideals which he sought to realise in social life. But this does not apply to all the plays of Shaw. In some of his plays he is not at all a propagandist and a reformer. He has no axe to grind in such plays as Fanny’s First Play and You Never Can Tell. They are not at all concerned with propaganda. In these plays Shaw gives himself entirely to the job of providing intelligent amusement. “He is not so much a dramatist, in spite of his propaganda, as an artist who has dramatised propaganda itself.”* “The Gadjfly who stung society to the quick went on stinging, and even in extreme old age emerged from time to time to prick real or imaginary foes. But he left behind no savour of bitterness for the young as well as the old. He was the cheering, zestful, great-hearted veteran who loved the smell of the battle in the field of ideas, who, with an exhilarating smile on his face, was still happy to challenge and attack again.”

† Allardyce Nicoll: British Drama.
* J. W. Marriott: Modern Drama.
† Scott James: Fifty Years of English Literature
Shaw’s Plot Construction.

“Shaw’s ideas can never cease to form an important part of his dramatic legacy. Nevertheless it is as a dramatist upon the stage that Shaw demands primary consideration.”* It is as a dramatist that he has to be judged by his readers and the first consideration in this direction is the examination of his plots and his skill in plot construction.

Shakespeare had borrowed his plots from various sources, but he had never sacrificed the story for the sake of his ideas. Plot construction was well known to the great artist. A great artist had the skill of a seasoned master in the manipulation of his plots having several threads which stand in a harmonious pattern as in The Merchant of Venice and A Mid Summer Night’s Dream. But Shaw, who is considered next to Shakespeare, paid little heed to the story or the systematic development of plot in his plays eschewing irrelevancies from the dramatic point of view. In the Postscript to Back to Methuselah Shaw declared, “When I am writing a play I never invent a plot. I let the play write itself and shape itself, which it always does even when up to the last moment I do not foresee the way out. Sometimes I do not see what the play was driving at until quite a long time after I have finished it.” The plots of Shaw are loose, and the dramatist introduces scenes in his plays which do not seem to have any vital link with the main thread of the story. His stories ultimately dwindle into mere situations and episodes. In his later plays all sense of plot is lost and the dramatist just starts talking with the readers. He completely dispenses with the need of a story. Getting Married and Misalliance are little else but interesting talk. When the critics complained that they were not plays at all but “dramatized conversation,” he retorted: “A play is anything which interests an audience for two hours and a half on the stage of a theatre.”

Absence of Action in Shaw’s Plays.

A dramatist who lays emphasis on talk and conversation in his plays cannot be expected to give action the prominence it deserves in drama. Action is wanting in many plays of Shaw, and whatever action is present is smothered by the sallies of wit and

* Dr. A. S. Collins: English Literature of the 20th Century.
louts of intellectual swordsmanship. The want of action is made
up by an extra dose of dramatic dialogue. "If the dramatic
dialogue is good enough" says Joad, "what of the action? There
is something faintly vulgar about the alteration of position of
matter in space which is, after all what action is."*

Lack of Conflict in Shaw's Plays.

Conflict, which has been adjudged by critics as the life-
breath of drama, is lacking in Shaw's plays. Instead of the
dramatic conflict the dramatist introduces mental conflict in his
plays. His importance lies in the fact that he transferred conflict
of modern drama from the physical to the mental plane. To quote
A. C. Ward, "A great deal of critical disapproval of Shaw's plays
has been based upon the supposition that they lack the primary
element of conflict. If conflict in drama necessarily implies a clash
involving either violent physical action or intense emotional
disturbance, then conflict in that sense is often lacking in the
Shavian drama. It is, however, intentionally lacking, and its place
is taken by mental action, which to Shaw is far more exciting.
For the conflict of passion Shaw substitutes the conflict of thought
and belief or rather, he brings moral passions to the stage to
break the long monopoly of physical and sensual passion."**

Shaw's Characters

Shaw has enriched dramatic literature by creating a variety
of characters drawn from all classes of people in our society.
"After Shakespeare no English dramatist equals Shaw in the variety
and vividness of his characters, though he lacks almost entirely
that interest in the individual person which is one of
Shakespeare's qualities." The characters of Shaw are representa-
tives of certain ideas which the dramatist seeks to propound
through them. Some of his characters are mere mouthpieces of
his theories invented to supply a necessary contribution to an
argument while others are really projections of his own personality.
It is very nicely pointed out by Scott James, "that there was at
least one human character that he could depict to the life, and
that was his own. In half of his plays there is one human being
who is copied from life and appears under different disguises, and

* C. E. M. Joad: Bernard Shaw.
** A. C. Ward: Bernard Shaw.
that is the infinitely various yet always the same George Bernard Shaw."

If Shaw's characters are merely puppets standing for certain ideas, speaking their parts not as life but as Shaw's arguments dictate, how they give the air of verisimilitude, still less the less, which the enjoyment of drama requires. This is a pertinent question. Shaw's characters, inspite of being puppets and mouth pieces of the dramatist have life in them because "he is so witty, because his stage craft is good; and especially because he has prepared the minds of his audience by written prefaces to his plays which are far more convincing than the plays themselves."

"His characterisation sometimes lacks the power of fully convincing us, because it does not always arise from such immediate creative insight as does the general idea of the play, but is to some extent dependent on that idea for the nature and variety of its figures. But once started on their career, his people share the vitality of the whole even when that is a vitality not of action but of talk. They may, indeed, be carried away by the zest of the argument and talk too much like Shaw and not enough as individuals, but this only enhances the unity of the play and its dramatic effectiveness."

Shaw, inspite of making his characters talking machines, has been able to give some outstanding individual characters such as Bluntschli, Father Keegan, Shotover and Saint Joan who can well be placed in the gallery of signal individual characters in British drama. His Alfred Doolittle in Pygmalion, Tanner in Man and Superman, Larry Doyle in John Bull's Other Island, Magnus in Apple Cart are memorable additions to the national heritage. Some characters of Shaw are intensely vital, and stand on their own right as masterly creations of the great dramatist. Energy Straker, Laza Dolittle, Rummy Mitchens, and Brother Martin are really great creations. We may not come across Shaw's characters in the streets and buses, in the cinema hall and the public pub, but in their own world they are as 'live' as the characters of Dickens in their own world. Shaw's characters are never mere dummies or conventional types. They are lively,

* Dr. A. S. Collins: English Literature of the 20th Century.
vigorous and witty.

Shaw's portrayal of women is masterly. Shaw invented the modern woman before he discovered himself. "Women, above all, he read and presented with a cunning unromantic realism which suggests that, like the novelist Richardson, he understood women even better than men: to Saint Joan may be added among his many vividly realised women, Raina, Cleopatra, Candida, Ann Whitefield, Major Barbara, Jennifer Dubedat and Eliza Doolittle, to name only a few." In the opinion of Harrison, "Barring Candida and Lady Cicely (Captain Brassbound's Conversion) Shaw's women from Blanche, his heroine in Widowers' Houses to Vivie Warren in Mrs. Warren's Profession, are distinctly unpleasant, practically unsexed women. Their bodies are as dry and hard as their minds, and even where they run after men, as in the case of Anne in Man and Superman, the pursuit has as much sex appeal as a time table. Whether such women ever existed is an open question."*

"Shaw's men when they are popular heroes, are often pretentious weaklings. He pulls Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Caesar from their pedestals, and reveals them to us as human beings with all the frailties of the flesh. He laughs at the athletic type of socialist parson who, for all his popularity in the pulpit, is really a great baby. He pokes fun at the foreign missionary. He is amused by the Spanish bandit. He chuckles at the Prime Minister, the soldier, the aggressive Labour man and the devil."†

In two directions Shaw's characterisation had special attraction and power. He successfully evoked the sympathies of the readers in unattractive people like Mrs. Warren and Louis Dubedat. He created with enthusiasm characters of broad comedy like those of Dickens such as Candida's father Straker and Eliza's father Alfred Doolittle. In these humorous figures idiosyncracies are emphasised to create pure fun.

There were no conventional heroes or villains in his plays. Like the plays of Galsworthy, the dramas of Shaw hold the audience as the villain. David Daiches says, "And often the real

* G. B. Harrison : Bernard Shaw.
† J. W. Marriott : Modern Drama.
villain is not a character in the play, but the audience. For the audience, the average playgoer represents that thoughtless complacent, sentimental society which, for Shaw, was responsible for so much distortion of vision and so much evil and suffering."

Shaw's Wit.

Shaw is the master of wit rather than emotion. He had the devastating wit of an Irishman with the penetrating logic of a Frenchman. He distrusts emotion and never allows his characters to run into emotional utterances emerging from the heart. His appeal is more to the mind than to the heart, and his wit wins us more than his emotional expressions occasionally slipping out from the lips of his tragic characters like St. Joan. "From the days of Widow's Houses Shaw's wit sparkles through his plays. With Arms and the Man it began to have great prominence. Wit is the very essence of Shavian comedy, in which the dramatist, standing outside the world he creates, sees it with and impish detachment."*

Shaw is the master in the field of comedy writing. He belongs to the great tradition in being a writer of comedy—often the comedy of manners. To the existing types of comedy, such as the Romantic comedy of Shakespeare, the satirical comedy of Ben Jonson, the comedy of manners, the comedy of intrigue, the sentimental comedy; and the comedy of humour, Shaw added the "comedies of purposeful fun." "His fun is something peculiar to himself, an effervescing bubbling-up eternally youthful and joyous exuberance of spirit. He is continually inventing ideas and poking fun—poking fun at us, at his audiences, at his characters, at ideas. Over all Shaw has thrown the mantle of his peculiarly dominating sense of fun, just as Shakespeare cast the radiance of his humour alike on Dogberry and Claudio."**

"Shaw's comedy of ideas is full of life and fun; comedies like Major Barbara (1905), Androcles and the Lion (1913) and Pygmalion (1913) are entertaining as well as critical and stimulating; but all this comes from the sparkle of Shaw's mind, and not from a fully realized dramatic projection of a complex vision.

* E. Albert: A History of English Literature.
** A. Nicoll: British Drama.